

An Introduction to the Heart of Dhamma

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In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from www.suanmokkh.org and www.bia.or.th. The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the volunteer and the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

First of all, I'd like to express my joy that all of you have come to this place in this way, namely in searching for Dhamma. We'd like to take a little time to consider why it is that we speak at 5 a.m. This may be a little strange for some of you and go against your usual way of doing things, so we ought to consider the advantages and benefits of speaking at 5 a.m.

At this time of day, the mind (or you could say 'the brain' if you wish) is fit and ready for accepting and for receiving new things. This is naturally a time for awakening and blossoming. Most of the animals in the forest awaken before dawn and it's this time of the day when many of the flowers will open up and blossom. In nature, this seems to be a time where things open up and blossom.

We should consider the fact that this is a new day, the start of a new day and the mind is ready and open to storing new things and to inscribing new things.

Further, there is something special that is we have our morning walk but it's not an ordinary walk. Your walk from the meditation center to here is something special. By this we mean walking without any ego and without all the 'me' and 'my' kind of baggage. But just walking with mindfulness and wisdom, with a kind of ready applied wisdom that it's just nature walking, that it's just a natural process of walking but there is no 'me,' no 'mine,' and no 'ego' that does the walking. This is the special kind of morning walk that also adds to the benefits of this time of day.

The subject – ‘walking without a walker’ – is a practice that is at the very heart of Buddhism. To just walk naturally and simply without adding the ego, the ‘self’ to it. This is the central teaching of Buddhism, that is the teaching of *anattā* (‘not-self’). So in walking without a walker, we get right down into the heart of things.

As for the subject of this morning’s talk, I feel that we should make some understanding of the word ‘Dhamma’ so that we understand it thoroughly, profoundly, directly, and clearly. So this morning we will talk about Dhamma.

Please don’t think that this is a waste of your time. In fact, it may take quite a bit of time to understand Dhamma completely, but it’s worth it. All the effort and time you put in will be repaid and more. We will study Dhamma from all angles in all aspects so that one has a thorough understanding of what it is about and then we will be able to select the Dhamma we need to practice in order to solve our problems.

It’s like when we climb to the highest peak of a mountain and then from the top summit of the mountain we can look around and see everything in all directions, and see it clearly. And then from that viewpoint we can see what’s happening and how we should respond, what we should do next. This is the kind of perspective we will be seeking in today’s talk, to have that comprehensive view of Dhamma.

The mountain here is Dhamma and climbing to the top of the mountain means to study the most profound aspect of Dhamma. Then when we know the Dhamma which is most profound, we’ll be able to see that Dhamma in fact has many aspects, and that there are many kinds of *dhammas*, many levels, many angles on Dhamma. We can only understand this when we have the viewpoint of the highest Dhamma to look from. Then when we see all these different aspects and levels of Dhamma, we will be able to choose those which are appropriate for us in order to solve our problems.

We can study Dhamma in terms of the etymology of the word. We can study it linguistically. We can study Dhamma in terms of the theories about nature so that we understand nature and natural phenomena thoroughly. Then we can study Dhamma from the perspectives of all the different sciences which we have in the world. If we do so, we will understand Dhamma from all angles in its many aspects.

We are going to use the word ‘Dhamma’ as the object of our study. ‘Dhamma’ is from the Pāli language which is the ancient original language of Buddhism. We are not going to speak of the ‘Dharma’ which is Sanskrit which is the language of Hinduism and other things like that. So we’ll use the word ‘Dhamma’ as the basis of our studies.

The first meaning of Dhamma that we should examine or consider is that it means to uplift, uphold, and then to maintain something. This is the first meaning of Dhamma.

If we use a word which is more psychological, we could use the word ‘cherish.’ First of all, Dhamma is that which cherishes itself and then it can cherish all other things as well. So Dhamma cherishes itself and other things in correctness.

Dhamma is that which cherishes itself, upholds, maintains, and sustains itself. So another word we can use is the word ‘thing in itself.’ Dhamma is that which is the ultimate meaning of ‘thing in itself,’ something that within itself has its own thingness which it can cherish, uphold, and sustain.

Another Pāli word which we should mention here is the word *dhātu* which is usually translated as ‘natural element.’ The root of this word *dhātu* is the same as the word ‘Dhamma’ which means to uphold and to maintain. So *dhātu* has essentially the same meaning as ‘Dhamma.’ The difference is in application where when we speak about physical materials things or things in general, we can talk about *dhātus* or ‘natural elements.’ But when we talk about mental, spiritual things, or religious things, then we prefer to use the word ‘Dhamma.’

Dhamma is something broader and more extensive than the abilities of humanity. It goes beyond humanity and includes all of nature. Dhamma is something beyond our own abilities. It includes everything in nature and all aspects of nature – both those which are phenomena and also the noumenon as well.

In order to understand things more thoroughly, we can distinguish four meanings of Dhamma or nature. The first meaning is ‘nature’ itself. The second meaning is ‘the law of nature, the law that governs all nature.’ The third meaning is ‘the duty that must be practiced according to that law of nature.’ And the fourth meaning are ‘the truth or results that one ought to receive due to performing that duty correctly according to the law of nature.’ So these are the

four meanings of Dhamma, but they can all be summarized into one word ‘nature.’

If you examine these four meanings, you’ll see that Dhamma means everything and that in the word ‘Dhamma’ everything is included and nothing is excepted or excluded. When we say ‘nature itself,’ the law of nature, the natural duty according to natural law, and the natural truths of that duty, you’ll see that these include everything that there is. There isn’t anything that isn’t Dhamma.

Now in order to get along with the religions that are theistic, we can easily explain these four meanings of Dhamma in theistic terms. The first meaning or nature is the same as the body of God – nature is the body of God. Then the law of nature is the consciousness of God, or the divine consciousness. Then the duty according to natural law, this is the same as the will of God. And finally the results of that natural duty are the same as the grace of God. So when we speak according to this principle of the four aspects or meanings of Dhamma, this can be applied equally well with the theistic religions. We just express it in slightly different terms.

If we look at things in this way, in terms of nature, we take natural reality as our basis, then we can see that there is no need to argue and fight amongst the religions. We can look at things in terms of ‘nature’ or we can speak in terms of ‘God,’ and we can understand each other without having any arguments. We can talk about Dhamma or nature in a theistic way or in a non-theistic way but there is no need to argue about it. Of course there will be people who will compete and argue to the point that they are unable to cooperate but we prefer to be able to talk about things in a friendly way with people from other religions and traditions so that we can, in the end, cooperate and work together for a better world. But some people would rather argue about things. Or we can also look at Dhamma... some people would prefer to see it in impersonal terms, just in terms of nature. Others prefer to look at things in a personal way. But still, either perspective comes down to the same basic reality. We should try to understand that, so that we can work together rather than argue and compete.

So please do your best to understand Dhamma in all four of these meanings – nature itself, the law of nature, the duty in accordance with natural law, and the fruits or results of performing that duty correctly. Or if you want and also understand it, in terms of the body of God, the consciousness of God, the will of God, and the grace that God will bestow upon us for doing her or his will. So these four aspects to it, and we hope that you will study them deeply and

comprehensively. Then you will see that there isn't anything which isn't Dhamma. Although human beings may not know about it yet, it's still included in Dhamma. Everything, the things we know and the things we don't yet know, are all Dhamma.

The subject of Dhamma is also related to language. There are two ways of speaking: one way is to speak in personal terms, to speak of 'people,' of 'individuals,' or 'selves' – we call this 'people language.' Another way of speaking is just to speak in terms of 'nature' and of natural realities – we call this 'Dhamma language.' Both of these languages however, are talking about the same thing. One does so in personal terms and the other does so in impersonal terms. One, we call people language, and the other we call Dhamma language. They both talk about the same thing but in different ways.

Dhamma includes everything, it includes all the things that are causes and it includes all the things which are effects, and it includes that which is neither cause nor effect. So you'll see that there is nothing that is excluded from Dhamma. Dhamma is everything. Whatever questions or problems you may have, although there may be hundreds or thousands of such questions, when we seek the answer to them we can find the answer in just one word – in the word 'Dhamma.' Dhamma is the answer to all the questions or all the problems. All the things that human beings feel are problems can be answered by simply Dhamma.

When we know everything, then we will be able to select the things that we need, the things that are appropriate for our situations. In other words, Dhamma is the correctness, the rightness which allows us to solve all of our problems. The correctness which can cut out, uproot, or eliminate all of our problems. This is in essence what Dhamma is about – that which will solve our problems, which will end our suffering (*dukkha*).

If we take our own feelings as our standards, then we will keep thinking and feeling that some things are 'positive' and that some things are 'negative.' But Dhamma itself is neither positive nor negative. From the perspective of Dhamma, nothing is positive or negative. It's only from our human biases and desires that we see things as being positive or negative. Dhamma however, is beyond positive & negative. So this is what can solve all the problems we create out of positive & negative. Therefore Dhamma includes everything without any exception.

If we take our own desires and feelings as our standards, then we will judge things as being positive or negative and this will entrap us and we will end up being the slaves of all these positive & negative things. But if we take Dhamma as our standard, then there is no need to judge things as being positive & negative, good & bad. And so none of these things can entrap us and therefore we are free. This is the meaning of ‘salvation’ in all the religions – to be freed and saved from the entrapment and pain of always discriminating things as positive & negative. When we stop doing that, the mind is saved, it’s free, it’s beyond the positive & negative and so nothing can entrap it. This is the meaning of salvation in all the world’s religions.

If we take our own feelings as our standards then we will have lots of problems, but if we take Dhamma as our standard then things just happen naturally and none of them are problems for us. But when we take our feelings as the standard, then the things that we like, the things that please us, and make us smile, we consider these to be good & positive and the things that we don’t like and displease us, we take these to be bad or evil – then life is full of problems, our lives are full of all the good & bad problems that come from taking our own feelings as the standard. But when we take Dhamma as our standard, there is no need to follow according to what pleases & displeases us. If there is something we want and we don’t get it, that’s ok! Or if there is something we don’t want and we get it, that’s ok too! If we take our feelings as the standards, those would just be problems. Not getting what we want and getting what we don’t want would be nothing but trouble, but with Dhamma it’s no problem. We can live our lives, we can take what comes without making any trouble out of it.

When we take our own feelings as the standards, then we distinguish two kinds of Dhamma or we categorize Dhamma in two ways. There is the Dhamma or the *dhammas* which enable us to end our problems, to uproot all *dukkha* (pain and misery). Then there are the dhammas which don’t help to solve our problems or even increase our problems. So there are these two aspects of Dhamma depending on when we take our feelings as the standards. The first kind of dhamma – the dhammas that enable us to solve our problems – these are called *kusala-dhammas* (wholesome dhammas, wholesome things). And those dhammas that don’t help to solve any problems or even make the problems worse are called *akusala-dhammas* (unwholesome dhammas). They’re these two kinds of dhammas. We ought to know the first kind well so that we can use

the kusala-dhammas to solve all of our problems. We also need to know the *akusala*, the unwholesome dhammas as things we shouldn't mess around with and as things we should leave alone.

When we speak of 'problems,' we mean all the things that are painful, all the things which are suffering for us. This means on the physical level – the physical pains and suffering, and it means on the mental level and also the spiritual level – all the things which are painful, miserable, and dissatisfying. On the physical, mental, and spiritual level these are the things that we call 'problems' or what we know as being *dukkha*.

If we don't have enough Dhamma or if we don't have the right Dhamma, then we will think that life itself is the problem. Without Dhamma, our life is full of problems and so we will think that life is the problem. But if we have enough Dhamma, the right Dhamma, the correct Dhamma then life isn't a problem and there aren't any problems in life. We just deal with things correctly as they arise and none of it need be a problem. That means there isn't any of the *dukkha*, any of the pain whether physical, mental, or spiritual. This is the result of having the right kind of Dhamma.

We'll take a little time now to study the life that bites its owner and the life that doesn't bite its owner.

First, we'll speak one by one giving some examples of the life which bites its owner.

If we don't have enough of the correct Dhamma, then love becomes a problem. All the kinds of love and all the different meanings of love become a problem, a burden, and create trouble for us. Even the moral kind of love or what is called 'loving kindness' without Dhamma this becomes a problem. This is the first example of things which become trouble for us because we don't have enough Dhamma.

The second example is 'anger' (*kodha*). *Kodha*, anger, is like when we light ourselves on fire. Because we don't have enough Dhamma, we go and torch and light ourselves on fire. Then we burn away. This is the second example.

The third example is 'hatred' (*dosa*). Hatred is we go and hate things that we don't even need to hate. There is no reason to have such a harmful negative opinion and view on things. Although it's not at all necessary, we go and hate things. But what's funny about hatred is that it doesn't harm or bite the thing

that we hate, hatred bites its owner. The one who hates is the one who gets bit by hatred.

The fourth example is 'fear.' There are different things in the world which seem frightening and so they make us afraid. This happens because we don't have enough Dhamma. So we go and get afraid of all kinds of things and now we have a world full of things that make us afraid because we don't have enough Dhamma. But if we have Dhamma, there is nothing that can make us afraid and frightens us.

The fifth example is 'worrying about the future' – worrying about things that haven't happened yet. Because we don't have Dhamma, we create all kinds of problems about the future. So this worry bites its owner. But if one has enough Dhamma, one can consider the future or what can consider what one must do without making any trouble out of it.

The next example is 'longing after the past.' Because we don't have enough Dhamma, we go and get lost in the past. We spend our time dwelling upon and longing after things which are past and things which are gone. This happens because we're stupid, because we don't understand and we don't have enough Dhamma we let ourselves dwell on the past and long after things which are gone. So this also bites its owner.

Next is 'envy.' When others are better, more successful, and more beautiful than us or whatever, we envy them. When people are worse off than us, not as good as us, and not as successful as us we want to keep them that way. Even when people are equal or the same as us we have envy, thinking that they ought to be worse than us or lower than us. This envy bites its owner. It doesn't bite the one whom we envy, it only bites its owner.

The next example is 'excitement.' There are things that stimulate us and we get all excited about them and this excitement bites its owner because when we are excited, there is no peace, there is no rest. Excitement is just a strain on our bodies and minds. Because we don't have enough Dhamma, we like excitement and chase after it which just shows our foolishness. The person with Dhamma has no interest in excitement, and need never get excited because the person with Dhamma knows that excitement bites its owner and that it has no benefits. It just creates a lot of trouble.

They travel all over the world looking for exciting, stimulating, wonderful things – whether exciting material things to buy, exciting places, or exciting

shows, art, or culture – they travel all over the place looking for excitement. But when they get their excitement, they don't find any peace. One can't find any peacefulness in excitement. In things which are marvelous, wonderful, strange and exciting, one will never find peace. They would just create more trouble for us. This excitement bites its owner – the one who doesn't have enough Dhamma. But whoever has Dhamma won't get excited about anything. None of these things will be able to bite it.

It's amusing that the foreigners like to come to Thailand looking for excitement, whether it's exciting exotic things to buy or looking for exciting souvenirs, looking for exciting beautiful places, exciting delicious food, exciting interesting shows and cultural demonstrations. It's funny how these foreigners like to come to Thailand looking for excitement but they never find any peace in doing so. There is no peace to be found in the excitement. But if they had Dhamma, they wouldn't go chasing around after all that excitement. They wouldn't have any problems because of it.

Because of this desire for excitement, they seek stranger and stranger things with which to get excited by and so they end up trying drugs. Many of these people get hooked up or addicted to drugs because of this search for excitement. Then there are the people who catch strange diseases because they want strange and exciting things. They catch strange and really terrible diseases, the kind that dogs don't ever get. Things like AIDS people catch because of their searching and looking for excitement. So they catch diseases or get addicted to things that they really need never get involved with if it wasn't for this ceaseless desire for excitement.

The next example is 'jealousy.' We're jealous of the things we get, we're possessive of them, and we do not want to share them with anybody. We accumulate more and more things being more possessive and jealous of them. Although we've got lots of things we don't really need and that we hardly ever use, we are very jealous of them and won't lend them to anyone. So we don't know any charity, we have no generosity – we are unable to give things that we ought to give because of this jealousy. The whole time we are jealous, it just bites its owner. But the person who has enough Dhamma is never jealous of things. The person who has enough Dhamma can be generous, can give whatever ought to be given, and can keep giving without any problems, worries, or sorrow or any of that because they have enough Dhamma. Jealousy bites its owner but with Dhamma there is no way it will bite us.

The next one is ‘sexual or romantic jealousy.’ In Thai language, there is a special word for this kind of jealousy. Ordinary jealousy is about material things, but this is the special kind jealousy. This is the use of the word ‘jealousy’ that we know very well in the West, it’s the romantic or the sexual kind. This kind of jealousy usually comes with love although it’s possible to love without jealousy. Once we love something, whether physically or mentally, then we become very jealous of it and this is the cause for many murders in the world. Because of this jealousy, people go and kill and so it obviously bites its owner. But the person with Dhamma won’t feel any of this sexual jealousy.

We’ve given a number of examples of the things that bite their owners. This isn’t everything that bites its owner but this is a number of some of the most important things which bite their owners. We’ve mentioned ten of them so that should make the point very clear when we talk about the life that bites its owner. So please try to deepen your understanding as we go through these one more time.

Love in all of its meanings; anger, aversion in all of its meanings; hatred on every level of this stupidity which hates; every kind of fear; every sort of excitement; worrying about the future; longing after the past; envy; ordinary jealousy; and then the sexual or romantic jealousy which has a very powerful meaning that makes it easy to commit murder.

We think that you probably know these pretty well already so that it’s not necessary to go into lengthy explanations. You all ought to be familiar with these ten examples. These are the life which bites its owner. The life which lacks Dhamma bites itself. We’ve never seen a dog that bites its owner but we see the life that bites its owner all the time, therefore it’s worse than a dog. The life that lacks Dhamma bites itself all the time, over and over and over again. So we look at Dhamma as being correct, as being the correctness that makes life peaceful, useful, and beneficial and that gives us a life that doesn’t bite its owner.

So we will summarize our definition once more – the life which is correct according to the principles of nature so that it doesn’t bite its owner, that is the life that has Dhamma.

Now please let us tell you the best most important definition of the word ‘Dhamma.’ Please get yourselves ready to listen carefully.

Dhamma is the system of practice. When we mean ‘system,’ we mean that it’s complete. It’s not just one or two things but it’s the whole system of practice. Dhamma isn’t just knowledge, it’s not something you read in books or memorize, intellectualize, or philosophize about. Dhamma is something we live, something we put into practice. Dhamma is the system of practice which is correct for the sake of salvation or correct in line with salvation. The kind of being correct in the way that gives us trouble, the kind of correctness that makes us hot that makes us suffer, the kind of correctness that brings dukkha is something we don’t want, we are not interested in that. The only kind of correctness that interests us is the correctness that leads to survival, to salvation.

Nowadays in this exciting modern world of ours, we’ve only got the kind of correctness which creates crisis. We have correctness for crisis, we don’t have the kind of correctness that brings about salvation. This correctness that leads to more and more problems and crises, we don’t want anything to do with it.

The salvation or emancipation that we seek is for both body and mind – so the Dhamma which is the system of practice which is correct for both physical and mental emancipation through every stage and step of life from the moment we are born from our mother’s womb until the time we die and are put into the coffin. Every stage and step and of the way, this is where we apply the Dhamma – the system of practice. And all of this must be both for oneself and for others. We must consider others because there is no way that we could live alone in this world. If they were to give us the entire world all to ourselves so that we could live here all alone, we wouldn’t take it because we would just die. If we were all alone, we would die because we depend on others. So in Dhamma we must think of others as well.

So let us repeat this once again, please listen carefully. Dhamma is the system of practice which is complete, which is correct regarding salvation, both physical and mental, for every stage and step of life, both for ourselves and for others. This is the most complete definition of the word ‘Dhamma’ that you can find. You have all come from distant countries, we hope that in your travels, you are searching for Dhamma and that you find this Dhamma – this correctness for the sake of salvation.

And finally, let us mention another quality of Dhamma that it the Dhamma is the thing, which the person who gave birth to Buddhism that is the ‘Buddha,’ honored the Dhamma. The thing that the Buddha honored and respected above all else is the Dhamma.

So finally, we must ask your permission to speak of the four meanings of the Dhamma again so that we can choose the meaning which is most important. One, Dhamma is nature or Dhamma is the body of God. Two, Dhamma is the law of nature or the consciousness of God. Three, Dhamma is the duty which is correct according to the law of nature, in other words, the will of God. And four, Dhamma is the fruit that comes from correctly performing that duty according to the law of nature, in other words, the grace which God bestows on us for doing the will of God.

When we repeat them more briefly, there is ‘nature,’ ‘the law of nature,’ ‘the duty in line with natural law,’ and ‘the fruits of performing that duty.’

So would you all please discriminate for yourselves, find out for yourselves which of these four is the most important. I would like to specify that the third meaning ‘the duty in accordance with the law of nature’ is the most important meaning of the word ‘Dhamma.’

Even though we may know nature and the law of nature, if we don’t perform our duty then we don’t get any benefits from our understanding of nature. Then we needn’t worry about the fruits of that duty. You don’t have to think about them at all. Just do the duty and the fruits will come by themselves, we don’t have to give them any special attention. Therefore you can see that the duty according to natural law is central – it’s the pivot – it’s what completes the whole set of four meanings. So the most important meaning of Dhamma is the duty.

Now let’s make the meaning and understanding of this word ‘duty’ even more clear and precise. One, we have the duty of knowing the problem, it is our responsibility to thoroughly understand the problems in life, the problems of life, namely *dukkha*, the pain of body, mind, and spirit. Second, we have the duty of solving the problem so that it disappears. Third, we have the duty of living life without any problems, of being victorious over all problems. In short, we have the duty of knowing the problem, solving the problem, and living without any problems. So Dhamma is what allows us to understand everything having to do with our problem. Dhamma knows the problem, Dhamma can solve the problem, and Dhamma empowers us to live without any problems. Dhamma which is complete is complete in this way.

Next we’d like to talk about ‘choice.’ Amongst us there are a number of differences according to our preferences. We each have the things that we

prefer. There are also differences in our ability to study and practice Dhamma. So each of us has the right and the responsibility to choose the Dhamma which is appropriate for ourselves in order to study and practice that Dhamma.

If we have sufficient intelligence and an appreciation for science, we can study Dhamma in a scientific way. We can just apply scientific and natural principles in order to study and practice Dhamma in a straightforward direct way, meaning we study the natural principles of what dukkha is, of how this life is dukkha, how it becomes painful and dissatisfying. So we study what the life of dukkha is and we study, investigate, and explore how that comes about – how is it that life is turned into dukkha? Then we study the life that doesn't have any dukkha – what is the life that is free of dukkha? Then we investigate and develop the way of living, the path which eliminates all *dukkha*, all of this dissatisfaction and pain on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels.

We can talk in economic terms because economics is so important. It's on everybody's mind in this modern world and everybody is concerned with economics. The meaning of economics is to give things value – to take things which don't have any value and to give them value – or things that have a little value to give them greater value – this is the spirit of economics. In order to make things have value or to increase their value, all you have to do is to practice Dhamma. If you practice Dhamma then things will happen that never happened before. Valuable things will occur that never happened and these things can be developed and made even more valuable simply by practicing Dhamma. This is an economic viewpoint on Dhamma.

Then we talk about 'health.' Nowadays people only know and are only concerned about physical health, so the result is that many people have very poor mental health. The number of crazy people or the number of people addicted to alcohol and drugs is growing. The people with mental problems are growing more and more. So mental health is harder to find in this world. Then when we speak about spiritual health, it's almost as if there is no need talking about it because it's practically unknown. You don't hear about it on TV, none of the governments could care less. But when one practices Dhamma, one not only will have physical health, but mental health and most of all spiritual health.

We can look at Dhamma in terms of 'humanity' or in terms of humanism. The meaning of the word 'human' is to have a lofty mind – to be high-minded. But nowadays our mental levels have dropped really low. Our minds tend to be in the gutter with all kinds of low and crude things. Without Dhamma, we are

not really human. We do, think, act, and speak in ways that are not really human. But because nobody understands anymore what it is to be human, people think we're crazy when we say this. But when one practices Dhamma, one has a mind that is truly lofty – a mind that is no longer low, it doesn't wallow in low and crude things. It's a mind that is above all problems. When we lift up our minds high enough so that they're above all the turmoil and problems, this is what it really means to be human. So this is Dhamma in humanistic terms.

We could look at it in the aspect of 'social science,' especially the aspect of political science, which is so important these days and that everyone is so interested in politics, but the modern situation is that we have just got a bunch of selfish political parties – all these factions and parties and coalitions all over the place which are busy fighting and competing for their selfish interests. Nowadays the world is a mess with these various coalitions, parties, and alliances on the local, national, and international level. But with Dhamma, we won't need any of that, we can get rid of it. With Dhamma, politics in society will no longer be a business of selfishness. By practicing Dhamma, we can get rid of selfishness and then go about administering society in the world in a peaceful way rather than in selfish ways.

Then there is this aspect of 'art and music.' Most people when they think of Buddhist art think of statues, paintings, and temple architecture and things like this. But that's not really Buddhist art. That's just material art. The real Buddhist art is a spiritual art, it's the art of Dhamma – it's the art of doing our duty in the right way so that there is no ego, so that life is freed of egoism and selfishness, so that we can solve all problems even on the spiritual level. This is Buddhist art, this is the most beautiful, the most ascetic thing there is – putting things in proportion in their right place – this is the true Buddhist art and it's not a material art, but the spiritual art of practicing Dhamma. This has its harmony and melody. In the life of Dhamma practice, there is a harmoniousness, a beauty, and a melody. So Dhamma is also an art and a kind of music.

Finally, the last aspect is the aspect of 'religion.' Religion is simply the business of being liberated from the problems of this world in order to live beyond and above the world and that is all religion is about. This means to raise oneself and one's life above all the problems of the world and live with the highest, with the supreme thing. In personal terms, you can call that 'to enter the Kingdom of God.' In non-personal terms, we can say 'to live with Nibbāna' or

‘to realize Nibbāna.’ The meaning is to live totally with the supreme thing – to be above all the problems and dukkha of this world. This is the religious aspect of Dhamma practice.

You have all come here looking for something valuable and so we do our best to respond to that. So we are trying our best to first of all, help you to understand life – to know yourself, to know the life that you live, and especially to know life according to the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination). Second, we do our best to help you understand and know how to practice and begin to be successful in practicing *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing in and out) so that you will have the mindfulness and wisdom and be able to apply that wisdom and have the strength of mind in order to deal correctly with everything in life – in other words, with the flow of dependent origination that is our lives. So if you understand dependent origination and can practice mindfulness with breathing successfully, then you won’t have any more problems in life. The problems will leave and Dhamma will replace them. We’ll have a life with Dhamma instead of a life with problems and pain.

Last of all, we thank you for being good listeners and you have listened attentively. We wish you success in understanding life on all levels, especially the deepest and highest, and that you will be successful in your practice of *ānāpānasati* so that you will discover the life that is free and beyond all problems so that you can live a life that is peaceful and useful and doesn’t have any problems. So thank you for listening well.

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